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FIRE MARSHAL

OFFICE OF THE KANSAS STATE FIRE MARSHAL

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NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

August 23, 2006

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KEEP FIRE SAFETY IN MIND WHEN HEADING BACK TO SCHOOL

Some Simple Steps Can Keep College Students Safer From On- and Off-Campus Fires

The beginning of a new term means classes, homework, friends, and parties. With such hectic lives, students often don't pay attention to one thing that could kill them: accidental fires. As the new school year begins the Kansas State Fire Marshal wants to remind students to take action to protect themselves and their friends from fire. Nationally in the past six years, 89 people have died as a result of on- and off-campus fires and hundreds more have been injured, according to the Center for Campus Fire Safety, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preventing campus-related fire issues. August and September are two of the deadliest months for these fires and almost 80% of the deaths take place in off-campus apartments or homes, which is where three-fourths of college students live. That's one reason why Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius has declared September as Campus Fire Safety Month.

"Unfortunately, most college students do not realize how quickly a fire can occur," said Kansas State Fire Marshal, Jack Alexander. "Studies show you have on average three minutes from when the first smoke alarm sounds to escape. Students need to realize that they are not invincible, that fires do happen in campus-related settings, and that they can take steps to protect themselves, no matter where they live."

Common Factors in Student-Related Fires

Many fatal fires involving college students have four common elements: missing or disabled smoke alarms, careless disposal of smoking materials, alcohol consumption, and lack of automatic sprinkler systems.

Carelessly disposed of cigarettes are the leading causes of fatal fires in all residences, including rental properties where college students may live, according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). Students also can fall victim to fires started by open flames such as candles.

Drinking alcohol is common on college campuses. Studies show alcohol decreases inhibition and impairs judgment, which can increase a student's risk of not waking to the sound of a smoke alarm and perhaps not surviving a fire. The NFPA also found that more than 60% of adults killed or injured in smoking-material residential fires were either asleep or possibly impaired by alcohol. In addition, the NFPA says that while most homes and apartments – including rental properties – have smoke alarms, nearly 40 percent don't work, often due to dead or missing batteries.

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How to Help Prevent Fires

The Kansas State Fire Marshal's Office urges parents and college students to remember these fire safety tips when heading off to school:

- Install UL-listed smoke alarms in every room of an apartment or rental home. Battery-powered wireless smoke alarms, such as the Kidde Wireless System, use radio frequency technology to link together so that when one alarm sounds, all of the alarms sound. This immediate response helps provide early warning no matter where the fire starts, giving more time to escape.
- Test smoke alarms monthly and replace batteries as needed.
- Look for housing that is equipped with automatic fire sprinkler systems. Not every residence hall or rental property has them.
- Know two ways out of every building. A fire escape ladder, such as one offered by Kidde, can provide an alternate exit from second or third floor rooms.
- Properly dispose of smoking materials in ashtrays. After parties, check the cushions on couches and chairs for smoldering cigarettes.
- Purchase a fire extinguisher and learn how to use it BEFORE a fire breaks out.
- Use UL-listed extension cords and electrical appliances properly. Don't overload electrical outlets.
- If the residence has fossil-fuel burning appliances, such as a gas stove or furnace, install UL-listed carbon monoxide alarms on every floor and near sleeping areas.
- Never leave candles unattended and keep them away from items that could easily catch fire. Be sure to put out candles before going to bed.

For more information about campus fire safety, including a safety checklist, please visit www.campusfire.org.

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